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SECURITY INFORMATION

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

7 July 1952

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 252

SUBJECT: Significance of Shake-up in Vietnamese Cabinet

1. On 3 June, Emperor Bao Dai abruptly dismissed Prime Minister Huu and assigned the formation of a new government to the talented and extremely pro-French Minister of Interior and Security, Nguyen Van Tam. Before his appointment to the cabinet last March, Tam was chief of Vietnam's police and briefly governor of Tonkin, where his main interest was in cleaning up and administering pacified areas within the Delta. He is militantly anti-Communist and is aggressive, efficient, and energetic to a degree unique in Vietnam, but he is detested and even feared down to the village level for his repressive, sometimes arbitrary, methods. Like Huu he is a French citizen, and has a record of close and harmonious cooperation with the French. He is highly unacceptable to the Vietnamese, who know him first as a "French puppet," and secondly as a "cop." He will therefore start with even less popular support than Huu had, at a time when revitalization of Indochinese political life has clearly become a prerequisite to solution of the country's military problems.

2. The decisiveness of Bao Dai's action in replacing Huu, though undoubtedly encouraged by French Minister Letourneau, indicates that the Emperor is entering more actively into the political situation. Huu had become critical of what he considered excessive French privileges; his intransigence toward both Bao Dai and the French had been a major obstacle to Vietnamese progress. Letourneau has impressed upon the Emperor the seriousness of French reservations about continuing aid to Indochina, and has mentioned deadlines (e.g.,

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two years to develop a self-sufficient Vietnamese army) as a condition for French aid. Tam's appointment apparently suits Bao Dai's policy of satisfying French demands for the time being, playing a waiting game, and ultimately of assuming personal leadership.

3. In the Delta area, Tam's appointment was received with disgust, bitterness, and alarm both by newly appointed US Consul Sturm and by French military and political officials. They regard the development as a major victory for the Viet Minh, believing that popular disillusionment will benefit the Viet Minh recruitment program. Observers in Saigon, however, have taken a wait-and-see attitude. Although they expect the Viet Minh to exploit their propaganda windfall to the utmost, they consider it questionable whether many fence sitters will proceed to Viet Minh zones (Sturm himself has recently reported the attitude of the village dweller as one of watchful waiting, supplanting a "very bad" first reaction). They count on Tam to take strong measures against Viet Minh sympathizers and others who only reluctantly support the Bao Dai government. Furthermore, they concede Tam a chance to attract popular support by concrete, constructive achievements. There is scant hope of strong, representative government under Tam's leadership, and it remains to be seen whether he will be able to achieve more than the superficial orderliness of a police government.

4. Tam's official program, encompassing all measures repeatedly pressed for by Letourneau, is remarkably liberal. Emphasizing the necessity of total national effort to prosecute the war, Tam announced the following objectives: (a) the long-postponed constitution of a national assembly; (b) expansion of the National Army (of which his son is Chief of Staff); (c) financial reorganization and adoption of a budget; (d) development of a program of social and agrarian reform; (e) improvement of the efficiency of government machinery-national, regional, and provincial.

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5. Tam's new cabinet includes minority factions and is regionally representative. However, formal Dai Viet, Cao dai, and Catholic elements, ranking nationalists and confessionals, flatly refused to be represented in it. Cabinet members are generally as undistinguished as their predecessors, with the exception of the Vice Premier and Minister of Information who promises an energetic counter-propaganda effort, and the Minister of Defense, the honest, executive defense deputy under Huu.

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